

MINERVA QUILT PROJECT VENTURA COUNTY ARTS COUNCIL

ARTS FOR INCARCERATED MINORS

The [Ventura County Arts Council](#) (VCAC) is in its third year of facilitating a broad visual and performing arts residency program at Providence, a year-round court school providing educational services to minors incarcerated in the Detention and Commitment Housing Areas within the Ventura County Juvenile Justice Facility.

The residency program brings in teaching artists to work directly with the student population on projects that contain strong arts components, while at the same time emphasizing important life skills such as cooperation and mutual respect.

MINERVA: SYMBOL OF COURAGE, STRENGTH AND WISDOM

The qualities attributed to the Roman Goddess Minerva—courage, strength, and wisdom—and the images they evoke, provide the foundation for this year's powerful visual arts project. The young women at Providence created their own interpretations of the image of Minerva which were then fashioned into quilt squares. The California Arts Council displayed a number of the squares at this year's [Women's Conference](#), an annual event hosted by Governor Schwarzenegger and First Lady Maria Shriver.



this project for the VCAC. MB has fifteen years of experience working on collaborative public art

The Minerva Quilt Project was adapted by the VCAC from a project created by artist Marion Coleman for the Alameda County Arts Commission. Ventura County community artist MB Hanrahan led

projects with incarcerated and/or at-risk youth, and was a member of the committee responsible for establishing the VCAC Artist Residency Program at Providence.

A NEW WAY TO LEARN

The majority of the students at Providence have exhibited difficulty learning in a traditional academic setting. Anti-social behaviors, developed over time, have become the norm for their lives and limit their personal growth. Exposure to the arts provides students with new ways of relating to each other, an appreciation for the diversity of their communities, and new ways of approaching core subjects. Graduation from high school is a challenging but important goal for these young women as it is a significant step towards their leading productive and rewarding lives. This project can help these students along that path.

At their first class, students received a ten-page packet of background material on Minerva mythology.

The packet includes samples of how Minerva's powerful image has been used worldwide by institutions of arts and science, the military, and governments including the California State Seal. Minerva is associated with courage, strength, wisdom, poetry, medicine, commerce, crafts, and the invention of music.



Before creating their quilt squares, these young women participated in a class discussion and writing assignment based on a series of questions including:

How are old, outworn, unhealthy thoughts undermining your life, your energy, your happiness? Do you believe the worst of yourself, or the best? Which women in your life or celebrities remind you of Minerva? What qualities do they embody?

The participants then drew their own interpretations of the image of Minerva. These drawings were then enlarged and transferred to muslin squares using carbon paper. The canvases were then stretched taut and acrylic paints were used to fill in the designs. As some participants were released during the course of the project, their squares were completed by others in the class. The squares were finished into quilts by an offsite mother-daughter team who are themselves exhibiting community quilters.

The name Minerva comes from the ancient root for "mind." Traditionally, Minerva appears with her sacred olive tree wearing an aegis, a breastplate, edged with snakes. On her headdress is an owl, which identifies her as goddess of the deepest mysteries. The young women used much of this imagery in their designs.

REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE

After completing their panels the young women were asked to reflect upon their experience. Some of the questions were:

Do you consider yourself an artist? Do you consider yourself creative?

Did you know about Minerva before this project?

What did you learn?

What are you taking away from this project . . . is there a quality you are now inspired to develop?



Here are some of their responses:

Ashley: "I believe I'm an artist, someone with a creative mind. I think that having

fun and doing what I like to do really let me put some energy in something positive."

Veronica: "I was inspired in this project. It helped my self-control, just like Minerva. Now knowing what I learned, I would help in trying to inspire someone else so they can be exposed to how it helps focus."

Cheryl: "I did not know about Minerva before this project— that she had wisdom and that she was strong. I also learned that snakes stand for a warrior, and an owl stands for wisdom. Art is a way to calm myself . . ."

Merissa: "This project has helped me with my creative development by showing me good art can also be something you could learn from. . . I think that by doing this I have learned to take something simple and make it brilliant."

*Minerva Project
Conducted from
September 19 –
October 3, 2009
Minerva Project
Instructor: MB
Hanrahan, Artist
VCAC*

*coordinator:
Margaret Travers,
Executive Director,
VCAC*

*Providence School Probation Agency Coordinators:
Gabriel Tobias, Gail Papp*



*Photography of Artwork: Brian Stethem
Quilting: Cheryl Collart and Lauren Collart*

The Ventura County Arts Council received funding for this residency project from the California Arts Council's [Artists in Schools Program](#) and receives additional funding through the [State-Local Partnership Program](#) which supports county arts councils. For additional information on these programs check the CAC website or contact the respective Program Specialists directly: Rob Lautz, State-Local Partnership Program rlautz@cac.ca.gov and Wayne Cook, Artists in Schools wcook@cac.ca.gov.

